AGGADIC EXEGESIS IN THE 16TH CENTURY
Exégesis hagádica en el siglo XVI

SHAUL REGEV
Bar Ilan University
regevshaul@gmail.com

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Resumen: Los maestros de la exégesis rabínica del siglo XVI vieron en los textos hagádicos y midrásicos la base y fuente del pensamiento judío. Estos maestros idearon como función principal revelar las ideas filosóficas atesoradas en los dichos de los Sabios y transmitirlas explícitamente a la Filosofía general. La inclusión de estas ideas en los sermones fue para ellos una labor más hacedera que escribir directamente obras filosóficas. El sermón, dirigido a un público en general, estimuló a los exegetas de la época a explicar las ideas filosóficas de tal manera que pudiesen ser fácilmente entendidas por toda la congregación. La compaginación de dichas fuentes de sabiduría —la rabínica y la filosófica— otorgó al conocimiento rabínico un gran valor filosófico al convertirse en fuente de la literatura filosófica. Se distinguen tres facetas en este proceso de reconversión: 1. La incorporación de refranes de la literatura hagádica y midrásica con la finalidad de transmitir en el sermón el contenido filosófico que los respalda. 2. La recopilación de dichos rabínicos y extracción de los mismos del sermón presentándolos como unidades independientes. 3. Ultimar y organizar del material hermenéutico en un corpus textual ordenado.

Abstract: The sages of the 16th century viewed the Aggadic and Midrashic texts as the source and basis of an originally Jewish philosophy of a hidden and implicit character. These sages saw their main role in uncovering the philosophical ideas concealed in the sayings of the sages and accommodating them to the general, explicit philosophy. It was easy for them to disseminate these ideas in public by incorporating them in sermons, rather than by writing philosophical tracts. The sermon, which originally addressed the public at large, challenged the speaker to explain the philosophical ideas so that they would be easily understood by the congregation as a whole. By combining the two sources of knowledge – the Rabbinical sources on the one hand and the philosophical sources of the other – the former were established as highly valuable conceptually and as the very source of the philosophical ideas borrowed from them. Three major stages can be shown that mark the preoccupation with Rabbinical sayings from this perspective: 1. Incorporating the sayings into a broader framework and explicating them within the pertinent context. At this stage, the sayings of the sages and the Aggadic texts of the Midrash or the Talmud serve as the basis of the sermon, but the main purpose in delivering the sermon is to elaborate on its underlying theme. 2. Gathering a collection of such sayings, removing them from their context and presenting them as separate, autonomous entities. 3. Completing the collection and arranging it in a suitable sequence.

Palabras clave: exégesis, hagadah, sermones, filosofía.
Key words: Exegesis; Aggadah; Sermons; Philosophy.
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INTRODUCTION

Among the diverse fields of Torah study in the late Middle-Ages following the Expulsion from Spain, we find two areas that are especially remarkable for the extensive literary works that the sages left behind them. They are the responsa literature and the homiletic literature. While some of these works were published during their authors' lifetime or posthumously by their descendants or their disciples, the majority of these works remained in manuscript form and have been published gradually over the centuries since then. The homiletic literature, which has been neglected by researchers, has recently assumed an important and central place in research.

Research into Hebrew homiletics over time is a longstanding research stream now being revived. The first studies of Hebrew homiletics were conducted in the 19th century by Zunz[1] and thereafter in the 1930s by Israel Bettan.[2] Although there is a considerable chronological difference between these two studies, we can classify them as older research. Research into Hebrew homiletics of the Middle Ages onwards has lately attracted renewed interest with the publication of several recent studies on the topic. Research interest has been renewed, gaining some momentum through research by Joseph Dan,[3] Mordechai Fechter,[4] Jacob Elbaum,[5] and Mark Saperstien.[6]

One of the key questions that has no categorical answer is, what type of message did the preacher wish to communicate to his audience. Was he preaching ethics to his listeners or teaching a chapter of the Bible or Oral Law, religious law (*Halaḳa*), Kabbala, or philosophy?[7]

1. Zunz, 1832 (Hebrew trans., 1974).
2. Bettan, 1939.
3. Dan, 1975.
4. Fechter, 1976.
5. Elbaum, 1990.
6. Saperstein, 1989; Saperstein, 1996.
7. Horowitz, 1992; Saperstien, 1996b.

Zunz describes the sermon (*draša)* as a development of biblical exegesis, which was very popular during the Middle Ages in Spain and Provence. Sages there invested time and energy in exegesis of the Bible and Aggadah (legend) and naturally brought their findings to the synagogues and study halls, both to satisfy the need to explain the biblical verses recited in the synagogue on the Sabbath and holidays, as well as their own natural need to propagate their wisdom and publicize it widely. The sermon effectively replaced the earlier custom of reading biblical translations in the synagogue. Sermons developed in various directions, not always with positive implications. [8]

R. Judah Moscato stipulated that a preacher should meet two conditions. The first was form: The sermon should be pleasant and acceptable to the audience so that they would be attracted to listen to more sermons. The second condition was technical; that is to say, the sermon should offer new knowledge, wisdom, and ethics (*musar*) to the audience. It is not possible to have one without the other. Only the combination of these two elements creates the perfect sermon. [9]

In approaching an analysis of a homiletic composition, we must first attend to the author's goal and the text's general objective. What is the theme of the composition and the sermon; what differentiates this homiletical composition and text from a philosophical, kabbalistic or ethical one? Is the difference limited exclusively to the text's external form or are there other, more substantive differences between these types of compositions? Some differences in the text become evident only through a deeper level of analysis and close examination, rather than from an examination of its external form, and only a detailed study allows us to define the nature of the text.

The foundation of a written sermon may have been a publicly spoken sermon that was edited to its final publication form which might be completely different from what was publicly articulated, either in its length, the number of its references, and/or its structure. Sometimes it is clear that the author added explanations and sections that were not originally spoken. However, notwithstanding the changes that took place in the sermon in its transition from an oral presentation to the written

8. Zunz, 1832: 196.
9. Moscato, 1871: Sermon 23.

form, and despite the fact that a large share of the written sermons were almost certainly never spoken in public,[10] the written sermon plays a central role in revealing, albeit generally or imprecisely, the content and knowledge level; style of exegesis of the Bible and rabbinic texts; the state of that generation's religious observance, and the religious and moral issues that concerned the generation to which the sermon was directed. [11]

One of the conclusions of the research into homiletical literature from the Middle Ages is that this literature was written in order to provide theoretical material for readers read and learn, rather than as a model for sermons by future preachers, and were not necessarily designed to substitute for public sermons. Guide books were composed for instructing preachers. Sermons in the Middle-Ages were mainly teaching sermons that were not directed to preaching or moral issues, although some sermons were primarily designed to teach or preach ethics. The main purpose of the sermon in the Middle-Ages was to teach specific theoretical material. This content was typically linked to a biblical or talmudic-midrashic text.[12]

Analysis of several introductions to sermons written by the sermon authors clearly shows that the purpose of their work was not to give the reader models for sermons,[13] but to offer readers an intellectual, exegetical, philosophical method that combined philosophical sources with sources from the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash. Most authors distinguish between oral and written sermons. In some cases, the authors stress that the book contains ideas that were presented in a public sermon or vice versa: ideas from the book were mentioned in a sermon. There is hardly a single homiletic author who does not directly link his sermons to his work in book form.[14]

10. See for example, the Introduction of Antoli, 1866 and Arama, 1883.

11. Zunz, 1832: 199. See also Almosnino, 1588 and the Introduction by Alsheikh, 1897.

12. Bettan, 1939: 92-95, n. 2.

13. See for example Curiel, 1992: 237-238. R. Moses Alfalas would write sermons and send them to his disciples to preach. See Alfalas, 1597: Sermons 3 and 4.

14. See for example R. Menahem Raba, 1605. There is no mention in the book of the author having preached in public from this work. In the introduction he stresses the importance of reading and learning on the holidays and on the Sabbath but does not make any mention about listening to sermons. There are some sermons that are divided into chapters with each chapter is a sermon in its own right but continues the sermon's general

Even moral sermons had some theoretical academic content. Through his oral sermon, the preacher offered the congregation philosophical, allegorical, or Kabbalistic exegesis in the disguise of commentary on biblical verses or an aggadic article from the Talmud or Midrash. In this manner, the sermon became an integral part of the congregation's system of education and exegesis.

Unlike any other text book whose appeal is restricted to experts interested in the topic, homiletical writings in the form of books of sermons appealed even to those who were not necessarily seeking theoretical philosophical approaches, but rather sought a deeper level of understanding of biblical verses or Midrash. This same method of writing sermons that apparently were never preached was also used during this period in Christianity. In his book on homiletics in England during the Middle Ages, Owst[15] notes the fact that sermons were written in Latin and not the vulgar, that is to say, English in England or French in France, and concludes that these sermons were never intended to be freely available to the common people but were designed for various uses by the educated class and the clerics, including as raw material for composing sermons. The language issues as well as other issues that Owst discusses are also relevant for the composition of Jewish sermons. How is it that only few sermons from the Middle-Ages are not written in Hebrew? Actually, only in the 16th century do such compositions appear, and at the end of this century there is evidence of attempts to compose sermons in Ladino, such as the book, *Me'am Lo'ez*. In contrast, philosophical works and even biblical commentaries at that time were written in Arabic. Thus, Owst's answers appear to be relevant for Hebrew homiletical literature as well.

All the midrashic and aggadic literature, like all the Holy Scriptures, both the Written Law as well as the Oral Law, merited continuous pursuit

subject. For example, the sermon on repentance (Sermon 4) is divided into forty chapters of sermons. It is quite clear that this sermon was not said at one time and not even in sequel, although the author notes that a number of chapters are according to the number of Days of Repentance starting from the new moon of Ellul. The sermon was composed for reading and study. The anthology contains some more sermons that are divided into a number of chapters according to the same characteristic.

15. Owst, 1965: 228-278.

at all times and in all periods.[16] In each period, authors composed different types of commentaries on the midrashic works, according to each commentator's disposition. Some inclined towards the Scripture's literal meaning; some leaned towards the philosophical or allegorical-philosophical explanations, and some towards Kabbalistic explanations.[17] Some authors wrote comprehensive works on all the books of the Midrash, while others concentrated on individual books.[18] Below is an attempt to understand the development of commentaries on the Aggadah in the late Middle Ages, and specifically in the 16th century. It is not in our purview to address the commentary on the Talmud as a whole and we will not describe the commentaries and entire works on the Aggadah and Midrash. We will similarly not dwell on the unique exegetical method of specific sages. We will focus our discussion to what appears to be the stages of development of the commentaries, and on commentaries in process, that is, commentaries that never were drafted in final form, in order to illustrate the development path of a commentary to its consolidation. The topic of this article is development. Therefore, the figures and examples presented below are not necessarily in chronological order since not all authors left us with works that elucidate the development process of their work. Authors who finalized their commentaries have not left us with drafts but only allusions to the development of their work.

FROM SERMON TO COMMENTARY

Jewish sages throughout the generations were compelled to interpret the Holy Scriptures, each according to his background and his unique orientation.[19] Not all left us written evidence of their motives and methods for composing their commentaries. From those who did, we learn of two or more stages of work until a final composition was produced. Initially, the commentaries were lessons and sermons delivered in the synagogue or in the study hall, whether aimed at the general congregation or intended

16. Frankel, 1991: II 523-531; Benayahu, 1987. We will not be discussing aggadic exegesis in Poland and Germany. On this topic refer to Elbaum, 1990: 455.

17. Saperstein, 1980: 1-20.

18. Kahana, 1985.

19. Twersky, 1983 and Twersky 1983b.

for a small group of disciples. These sermons were sometimes recorded in writing after the sermon's delivery and sometimes in advance. Sometimes the preacher wrote down chapter headings or a draft copy before the sermon and subsequently revised it based on what was actually said. The disciples obviously assisted the preachers by recording their mentors' sermons. After such drafts accumulated into a sizeable body of work, and after the rabbi had sermonized the entire text in a cycle that may have extended even more than one year, the sermons underwent another round of revision and were arranged as a systematic interpretation in text form.

Evidence of such a process is found in introductions by various authors, including R. Isaac Caro in his introduction to the book *Toldot Yiṣḥaq*; R. Isaac Abarbanel in his introduction to his commentary on the book of Judges; and the introduction of R. Moses Alsheikh to the commentary on Daniel. From these introductions we learn about the various stages of commentary writing. In the transition from sermon to commentary we find an intermediate stage where the commentary is not arranged in the order of the verses but is set to the order of the weekly portion readings. All the sermons for a single portion would be collated under that portion, in order. In contrast to the sermons which might be broad and extend in many directions, the section adapted to commentary form was limited to the essentials, and focused on the verse or topic that it elucidated.

The prevalence of biblical commentaries is in directly proportion to the prevalence of pursuit therein. So, for example, there are more commentaries on the Pentateuch than on the Prophets. Chronicles is the biblical book with the fewest number of commentaries. Some authors elucidated a small number of chapters from the Prophets, selecting those chapters that served as the weekly Sabbatical reading from the Prophets (*haftora*). An example of this is the book *Liqquṭe man*. Sapiental books were also the target of numerous interpretations, due to the philosophical topics they addressed.

What was previously mentioned concerning biblical literature will serve as a background to the remarks below concerning Oral Law that is not religious law. Researchers in homiletical literature have already discussed the development and changes that occurred in sermons over the generations. In general, one can say that sermons initially addressed

verses from the Pentateuch from the weekly reading. Midrash and Aggadah were used by the preacher exclusively as embellishments and were not considered the primary part of the sermon. A change occurred in the mid-fifteenth century. Preachers began to mainly sermonize on Aggadah and Midrash. According to the prevalent structure of sermons in the 16th century, the sermon begins with a quotation of a verse or a portion of the Bible, which served the preacher as a «topic», or reference point to help him recall the topics or issues upon which he wished to preach. Immediately after mentioning the topic, the preacher moved to the Midrash or Aggadah that was the foundation for his sermon. The midrashic portion was typically from various midrashic works or from aggadic portions of the Talmud. From this point, the Midrash becomes the principle part of the sermon, while the Bible assumes a role of secondary significance.

We do not know what brought the preachers to transition from sermonizing from the biblical text to the Midrash. The main cause, or one possible cause, for this is that biblical exegesis had exhausted itself and preachers felt that they were becoming farther and farther removed from the Bible's original meaning and intention. This change may have been one of the indications of the Jewish Renaissance and the return to previously neglected sources. The preachers may have considered Midrash and Aggadah unique raw materials that could be used to reinforce Jewish faith, since the Bible was also being used by Christian preachers. Whatever the reason, the fact is that a change took place and the preachers focused on explicating and interpreting the Midrash. The words of R. Joseph Samegah bear witness to this:[20]

> ...that the custom has spread among all of Israel to publicly preach on the Sabbath and holiday on the Midrash and Aggadah and not on the simple Laws of Permitted and Prohibited.[21]

Sermons available to us are typically of greater breadth than what was apparently spoken in public. Sermons typically were not limited to

20. On him see Benayahu, 1980: 153-170.

21. See the Introduction by R. Joseph Samegah, 1586: 6b. The introduction was not printed in later editions: Samegah, 1884, and the photo-offset of this edition, Samegah, 1971.

exegesis or elucidation of the Aggadah. Sometimes they contained biblical exegesis and in some cases even contained commentaries on entire chapters of the other books of the Sapiental literature such as Proverbs and Job. However, the heart of the sermon was generally a commentary on the Aggadah. To pursue this analysis, one must study those sermons that, to the best of our knowledge, did not undergo later redaction by the author or by one of his disciples, or his publishers.

R. Jacob ibn Habib[22] was the first to collect Talmudic legends and interpret them in an essay entitled *'Eyn Ya'aqoḇ*. From the introduction we can conclude that R. Jacob ibn Habib's sermons on the Aggadah were delivered on the Sabbath at the congregation's request. The preacher's role here was to link the aggadic essays to the weekly portion and explain them with reference to the weekly portion. On this basis he also explains these links in his commentary. *'Eyn Ya'aqoḇ* expanded and became a collection of Aggadah from the entire Talmud to which the author added a short general explanation was not limited to the interpretation of words. But this represents a second stage of adaptation of a composition that began as an oral sermon in the synagogue.[23]

R. Shem-Tov Melamed, in the introduction to his commentary on Esther[24] remarks about his method of commentary on the Megillah:[25]

> I will explicate it by God's good hand upon me, as I am instructed by heaven, and quote the essays by our Rabbis OBM, which were truthfully said on that verse. I will explain them, and afterwards, I will bring what most of the commentaries, old and new, wrote... I named this book *Ma'amar Mordeḵai*... in which the essays by our early Rabbis OBM will be explicated about all the things truthfully said.

R. Shem-Tov Melamed's book of sermons, *Keter Šem Ṭoḇ*[26] was published by his disciple Samuel Segalmassi, who also added an introduction as well as a brief accolade. From the introduction it clearly emerges that one if not the most important of R. Shem-Tov's aims was to

22. Hecker, 1976.
23. See the Introduction by Ibn Habib, 1546.
24. Melamed, 1585.
25. Melamed, 1585: 3a.
26. Melamed, 1596.

offer a commentary on the rabbinic texts, for use by other preachers, and for use in his own sermons delivered to the general public.[27]

This same disciple repeatedly emphasizes R. Shem-Tov's use of the Midrash and Aggadah, and in his commentaries on them which he used in his sermons and in his role as a religious teacher[28] in his appointed communities. He composed his commentary on the Midrash using a number of methods: a literal interpretation (*pĕšaṭ*), a allegorical-philosophical interpretation, and the casuistic method. R. Shem-Tov's method of Midrash commentary is aimed at a broad spectrum of users including preachers who could make use of these interpretations in their own sermons. Explications of rabbinic texts were not added incidentally to exegesis of the weekly portion but were a goal in themselves. Along with the subject of the weekly portion, which he preached, studied and elucidated in his sermon, he added rabbinic texts.[29] For the readers' benefit, at the end of the book the disciple added a detailed index of the biblical verses and the rabbinic texts explicitly mentioned in sermons. The index contains no less than four hundred explained terms.

R. Moses Albelda, in the introduction to his *'Olat tamid*,[30] stresses that the principle aim in his sermons was to communicate innovative commentaries and interpretations of rabbinic texts. He also repeats this in his introduction his second book of sermons, *Daraš Moše.*[31] The sermons in his book, *'Olat tamid*, are not all structured in the format typically used for sermons in his era, and some are presented in a different format. Each sermon is divided into two related sections: The first includes an introduction and commentary or sermon on the weekly portion's verses, and the second contains his interpretations to one or more rabbinic texts. That is to say, that the sermon is divided into biblical exegesis and to commentary on rabbinic texts. For this book Albelda prepared two indexes arranged according to the weekly portion. One is an index of topics and subjects found in the sermons. The other is an index of rabbinic texts. In total, some two hundred eighty items are explained.

27. Melamed, 1596: 2a. See also Adarbi, 1895, author's introduction.
28. On this title and its duties, see Benayahu, 1953.
29. Melamed, 1596: 2a, i.e. the introduction by the author's disciple.
30. Albelda, 1600: 2a Introduction.
31. Albelda, 1603, author's introduction.

In the introduction to his second book of sermons, *Daraš Moše*, which was intended to have a more sermon-type of character, Albelda addresses the method of preaching and the book's contents, which is:[32]

> Generalities of each portion with explanations of portions that merit interpretation, as well as the difficult verses from the Pentateuch, Prophets, and the Writings read at the time, along with rabbinic texts.

The book contains more than two hundred fifty explained texts, including texts that are explained differently in several portions. As previously mentioned, the sermons in this book follow the conventional 16th century format: Each sermon opens with a midrashic text. Few sermons also contain the subject or mention the verses at the beginning of the sermon. This is found only in special sermons on special events, and is not found in the regular sermons on the weekly portions. In addition to the opening text, the sermon presents interpretations of additional texts.

The addition of the detailed indexes at the end of the book indicates the importance the authors attributed to their works and their designated purpose. Books of sermons from an earlier period, namely, the 15th century, did not customarily add detailed indexes of rabbinic texts or biblical verses. In isolated cases they contained an index that included everything that was contained in each weekly portion: the topics discussed, the biblical verses, and the explicated rabbinic texts. These indexes do not include a notation of page number, but only the name of the portion. An example of such an index can be found in the book *'Olat šabbat* by R. Joel ibn Shu'eib. In contrast, R. Shem-Tov ibn Shem-Tov's book of sermons contains no index at all. In the 16th century, the indexes for the articles and verses were added to the books, some of which we listed above, on the presumption that every such explicated text can stand on its own and does not need to be linked to a sermon. Any disciple or preacher could extract the text and its commentary and insert it in his sermon or his commentary, and no one would be aware that it was taken from a larger collection. In such books we find indexes even if the book was edited by its author and was not printed. For example, R. Israel

32. Albelda, 1603, introduction.

Najara's book of sermons, *Miqwe Yiśra'el*,[33] contains forty sermons and detailed indexes at the end of the manuscript. Among them is an index of rabbinic texts interpreted in the sermons.

COLLATION AND ARRANGEMENT

Another stage in the development of aggadic and midrashic commentary is evident from books such R. Jacob Matalon's *Še'erit Ya'aqoḇ* and *Toldot Ya'aqoḇ*, as well as *Leḥem mišne* by Solomon the Levite. R. Jacob Matalon prepared his book of sermons, *Še'erit Ya'aqoḇ,* for printing.[34] These sermons are a selection taken from a larger collection and are arranged in the 16th century format for sermons, namely, they are based on a Midrash or Aggadah rather than a biblical verse. Each sermon opens with a rabbinic text rather than a biblical verse. This book, as mentioned above, was apparently prepared for printing by R. Jacob himself and published by his father R. Solomon Matalon. In his introduction to *Še'erit Ya'aqoḇ*, R. Solomon only notes that he printed the book but does not state if he also edited it. The father also printed his son's second book, naming it *Toldot Ya'aqoḇ*.[35] The book contains commentaries on rabbinic texts from the Aggadah, and not from religious law. In this book, the texts are not interwoven into the sermon but stand on their own. In his introduction to this book, R. Solomon also refers to his work in his first book. From the introduction it is obvious that *Še'erit Ya'aqoḇ* contained many more sermons and was ready for printing. R. Solomon wished to fulfill his son's last wishes but because of financial issues he copied only a small portion (16) of the sermons in the book, and printed them. The second book was also edited, and the father made an effort to print it in entirety, in contrast to what he did with the first book.

The book consists of articles in numbered order. In contains a total of 151 texts from the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud, and the Midrash. The body of the book contains philosophical explanations by R. Jacob on these texts. In many places, the father, R. Solomon, added his own

33. Regev, 2004.

34. Matalon, 1596.

35. *Toldot Ya'aqoḇ* is bound together with *Še'erit Ya'aqoḇ*. The books were named by the father. The second book was thus in order to have a remembrance because R. Jacob's sons, R. Solomon's grandchildren, passed away during their father's lifetime.

explanations that were not related to his son's interpretations. That is to say, the father added his own interpretations of the rabbinic texts and did not limit his role to that of a published of his son's work.

Another example is R. Isaac Adarbi's book, *Diḇre šalom*.[36] The book is divided into two sections. The first section contains a collection of commentaries on rabbinic texts arranged according to the weekly portions. Each weekly reading contains more than one text but the texts have no exegetical or the homiletical connection. In contrast, the second section contains 29 completely structured sermons in sermonic format, based on a single topic discussed by various sources.

Similar is also R. Solomon the Levite's book, *Leḥem Šĕlomoh,*[37] which is «a commentary on the texts dispersed in the Gemara and Midrash». In his introduction to his book, R. Solomon the Levite reveals to us that he had two goals for his lessons and sermons: to teach the religious law found in the Talmud and to teach the Aggadah, which is superior even to the religious law. The Aggadah is the true wisdom that is superior even to Greek philosophy.[38]

R. Solomon the Levite compares the Aggadah to the essence and the backbone of Torah pursuit because it reveals the Torah's secrets to us. Following Maimonides, he also does not consider preoccupation with religious law to be the main part of Torah learning.[39] In his opinion, Aggadah is the true wisdom; it is Jewish philosophy, which is ten times superior to general philosophy. The aggadic portion of the Talmud and Midrash is the most tasty and exquisite morsel, unlike the coarse food that is the section on religious law in the Talmud.

According to R. Solomon the Levite, he planned to write commentaries on the aggadic articles while he was yet young and he executed this plan when he began to preach and deliver lessons to property owners who were unable devote their time to study because of the difficulties of livelihood. His sermons included both religious law and

36. Adarbi, 1895: part 1, Adarbi, n. d. (Offset reprint).

37. Ben Isaac Halevi, 1597. On this see Rossanis, 1937-1938: II 108-110. Hecker, 1970 and Hecker, 1969.

38. Ben Isaac Halevi, 1597: 2a, introduction.

39. Maimonides, *Guide* III, 51.

Aggadah. At that time he began to write commentaries on the texts he collected, and later edited them in book form: [40]

> Our Sages OBM were extremely brief in their texts and avoided verboseness. This requires special understanding, both of their formulation of their ideas as well as the contents. Ideas and hints about important topics were compressed into few words. A reader who reads the texts literally can extract a single simple idea, but , it is our duty to plunge into the depths of these issues. Into a few short words, the rabbis poured complicated ideas based on various areas of wisdom, presented as a coherent whole. To understand them, one must deconstruct and analyze them according to the various insights. Understandably, the congruence between wisdom and the rabbinic interpretations is the true meaning that is offered. R. Solomon himself spent a great deal of time with various teachers to study all areas of wisdom including languages to enable him to apply these wisdoms to understand the rabbinic texts. The texts are difficult to understand and only an enlightened person can truly understand them.

R. Solomon edited this book from drafts that he had been collecting over the years as a teacher and preacher. When he assembled them into a final book he decided that it was more appropriate to condense the text and focus on the main points of understanding the rabbinic texts rather than elaborate by adding questions and answers, which was a popular method in use by 16th preachers. As models for his writing he mentions two sages, R. Meir Aramah[41] and R. Abraham Shalom,[42] who both integrated rabbinic texts into their own works and explained them in a succinct manner.[43]

Another project involving Aggadah was reflected in R. Jacob ibn Habib's *'Eyn Ya'aqoḇ*[44] in which he collected and explained «all the Midrash on the Oral Law that are written and dispersed throughout the holy composition, which is divided into six orders».[45] In ibn Habib's opinion, this project is comparable to Maimonides' *Mišne Torah* project

40. Ben Isaac Halevi, 1597: 2a, introduction.
41. On him see Rossanis, 1937-1938: II 17-19 n. 37.
42. On him see Davidson, 1964.
43. Ben Isaac Halevi, 1597: 2a, introduction.
44. Hecker, 1976.
45. Ibn Habib, 1546, Introduction.

involving religious law. «The Aggadah is scattered throughout the Talmud, strewn and dispersed in chapters and contained in decisions on monetary matters, principles of belief like precious stones and pearls hidden and buried». Aggadah plays an import role because it, rather than religious law, is the foundation of belief and religious truth.[46]

CONCLUSIONS

The commentators' intentions, whether explicit or implicit, was to reveal the secrets, the inner core wrapped in an exterior mantle. It is obvious to all that the Aggadah was not designed to tell stories but rather functioned as the moral of analogies that should be unveiled. The commentators almost never view the Aggadah literally but rather interpret it according to their background and method. Philosophers interpreted it as answer philosophical issues, and Kabbalists read in it answers to kabbalistic issues. Other found in the Aggadah a little of both. The 16th century preachers also established their own method for explaining the Aggadah, based on their background and education. The Aggadah was integrated into sermons, either at the beginning or within the sermon, and was expounded and explicated by the preacher. These commentaries, which initially appear incidental to the issue at hand (the sermon and its message), effectively emerge as the substance of preacher's exegetical pedagogic intentions.

46. Ibn Habib, 1546, Introduction.

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